DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 580 CS 507 820

AUTHOR Irwin, Harry
TITLE Australian Communication Scholarship: 1970-beyond 2000.
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (42nd, Miami, FL, May 20-25, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; Educational Change; Educational History; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Scholarship; *Universities
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

The development of Australian communication studies has closely followed capitalization upon the opportunities provided by major structural changes in the higher education system in the early 1970s and the late 1980s as well as those provided by disciplinary development and student demand. Before 1970, little in the way of communication studies was researched or taught in Australia. In the early 1970s, long-established universities were complemented by "new" universities, institute of technology, and colleges of advanced education that provided the opportunity for the introduction of communication studies. From 1970 to 1987, communication teaching and research was characterized by considerable diversity of disciplinary starting points and ideological positions. In 1987, a highly significant year, the 85 higher education institutions in the former university and advanced education sectors of higher education became 36 universities in a new unified national system. Overnight, communication studies was taught, and became the subject of major research initiatives, in universities which had previously resisted its introduction. Since 1987 postgraduate activity has grown and research activity has expanded. The field of communication studies is likely to grow in the future and because of Australia's growing links with its Asian and Pacific neighbors, Australian communication studies will probably be drawn to an increasingly Asian focus. However, a contemplated major shift of government emphasis and expenditure away from the university sector may provide the first major crisis for communication studies in Australia. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED347580

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP : 1970 - BEYOND 2000

Paper presented at the Convention of
the International Communication Association (ICA)
Miami, Florida
May 21 - 25 1992

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Harry Irwin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS507820

Harry Irwin PhD
Dean
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Western Sydney, Nepean
PO Box 10
Kingswood 2747
Sydney
AUSTRALIA.

Phone: 1-61-2-678 7373
Fax: 1-61-2-678 7399

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The decision to schedule the 1994 conference of the International Communication Association in Sydney has brought about an upsurge of interest in communication research and teaching in Australia. It is in that context that I have been asked to overview achievements in the field in Australia, to summarise the present rapidly changing situation, and to offer some predictions about the future.

The invitation I received to provide this paper asked for a "long term" view of Australian communication scholarship. I'll provide the requested overview of developments and offer some comment about them, but I must stress at the outset that communication studies is a relatively new field in Australian higher education and dates only from the early 1970s. Thus, a "long term" view, even allowing for predictions to, and a little beyond, 2000 can span only three decades. Saying this helps set Australian communication studies in time context : it also helps me adjust to the description of me someone penned for this conference's program proposal and which depicted me as something of the "old man" of Australian communication studies. While it is true I've been in there from the start, it really wasn't that long ago!

I'll structure the overview linearly. In doing so, I'll be committing one of the cardinal sins of contemporary humanities scholarship. But I hope it will allow you to draw comparisons with United States' developments and provide those of you with an interest in the 1994 conference with a quick reference on how communication studies in Australia has come to be where it is and about where it is headed.

I'll keep my references to the pre-1970 period brief, outline significant groundwork developments occurring from 1970 through to 1987, explain the significance of 1987 to Australian higher education and to communication studies, and then focus more upon recent, current, and likely future developments. A recurrent theme of the analysis presented is that the development of communication studies in Australia has closely followed capitalisation upon the opportunities

provided by major structural changes to the Australian higher education system in the early 1970s and late 1980s as well as those provided by disciplinary development and student demand.

Pre - 1970

In the period prior to 1970 very little that would be now recognised as communication studies was researched or taught in Australia. Some speech education occurred in the state teachers' colleges, largely in the traditions of British elocution training, and largely aimed at voice and diction to raise the "speech standards" of the sons and daughters of the working class training to be teachers in state schools. Studies of interpersonal, small group, organisational and mass communication were virtually non-existent. For comparative purposes, and to assist understanding of the developments which followed, it is important to know that there existed no traditions of the type that occurred in the United States in the fields of rhetoric, public speaking, attitude change and journalism as bases for development. At that time, 1970, you in the United States had the experience of nearly a century of journalism schools and the mass communication and media studies schools that were derived from them. You also had the experience of over 60 years of speech and public speaking schools and the interpersonal, small group and organisational communication schools to which they gave rise.

1970 - 1987

The "chance" for communication studies came in Australia in the 1970s. It was a chance that was eagerly seized upon. From the early 1970s Australian higher education was the subject of structural change that saw the long established universities complemented by "new" universities established to absorb increased demand for student places and to offer innovative, often interdisciplinary, courses and new research opportunities. These universities were further complemented by a second tier of new higher educational institutions, the institutes of technology and the institutes and colleges of advanced education as they were termed (roughly the equivalent of the polytechnics in the United Kingdom).

This structural change to a binary system of higher education provided the opportunity for the introduction and development of communication studies. This opportunity was taken up by those who saw the vocational and academic merit of what the field of communication had to offer and who were aware of student interest in communication as an object of study. Simply, it was the interest and contemporary relevance offered by communication studies that won it a place from the early 1970s as Australian higher education expanded.

At first this place was highly tentative. While a few fully fledged undergraduate programs emerged (principally in the big-city institutes of technology and with media, journalism, and public relations foci), the bulk of the early work was in the form of new majors in existing degree programs or service courses and sequences particularly in commerce programs. While postgraduate study and research activity was very limited until the 1980s, the late 1970s saw the beginnings of the publications that were to go on and become the major journals of Australian communication and media studies and, in 1979, the meeting that led to the formation of the Australian Communication Association. This association and its Australian Journal of Communication, along with Media Information Australia published by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, are now the principal public anchors of Australian communication scholarship.

Through to 1987, the 1980s was a time of consolidation and slow expansion. Several fresh undergraduate programs emerged in the new universities and the advanced education sector of higher education's binary system, graduate work in the form of vocationally oriented graduate diplomas and some masters work commenced, and research effort expanded significantly. However, research development was hampered by the reluctance of the Australian Research Council (ARC), the country's major university research funding body, to recognise communication studies as a separate funding category.

During the 1970-1987 developmental period, communication teaching and research in Australia was characterised by considerable diversity of disciplinary starting points and ideological

positions. The expansion of undergraduate student numbers in the late 1970s and 1980s led to the creation of a significant number of new faculty positions. While numerous appointments from overseas were made, the majority of faculty appointments were from within the Australian higher education sector and involved people with an interest in this new field but with graduate qualifications from a wide range of related disciplines. From the outset, Australian communication teaching and research was multidisciplinary in its base, if only for reasons associated with the way its development was staffed. Thus, throughout this period, those most involved in course development, teaching and research came from disciplinary backgrounds in areas such as anthropology, behavioural sciences, education, English, history, linguistics, philosophy, politics, psychology and sociology.

The variety of backgrounds of those contributing to the initial development of communication studies in Australia in this period ensured that the field, as it emerged, was exposed to the differing viewpoints, assumptive positions, and research methodologies then current in Europe (including the United Kingdom) and North America (including Canada). European approaches to communication studies, with emphasis upon structuralism and its variants, linguistics, semiotics and cultural studies came to Australian communication studies via English, linguistics, sociology and philosophy. North American approaches, centred (at least as they were then) on empirical studies of interpersonal and mass communication effects, found their way to Australia through empirical-quantitative, variable-analytic approaches to the study of education, psychology, management studies, journalism, attitude change and media content and effects.

When European and North American viewpoints about communication studies found expression in Australia simultaneously from the early 1970s they were immediately in competition for local recognition and adoption. This competition, while offering the capacity for Australian communication studies to choose the best of both worlds in determining its own direction created, instead, confusion and animosity. Australians, ignoring the possibility of developing a unique standpoint, and ignoring early developments in communication studies provided by their Asian neighbours, tended to adopt either European or North American approaches as the basis for

program and research development. The "space" provided by the overall scope of development meant that the opportunity existed for both groups to go their own way without any need to fully argue their position. This they did. A result, through to the present, is that both groups continue to exert influence but tolerate one another rather than respect alternative positions.

The position is, of course, complicated by the fact that there is no single European position and no one North American position. As the cultural studies "push", in all its many variations, now seeks to appropriate some of the space occupied by communication studies (in the same way the communication "push" had earlier appropriated other space) the position is further complicated.

1987 - present

The year 1987 was a very significant one. Major government initiatives (a Green Paper followed by a White Paper) set in train actions that quickly and dramatically altered the structure of Australian higher education. As the result of a rapid-fire succession of mergers and the formation of a number of new federated network universities, the 85 higher education institutions in the former university and advanced education sectors of higher education became 36 universities in a new Unified National System.

Overnight, communication studies was taught, and was the subject of major research initiatives, in universities which only a few years before had resisted its introduction. And this happened simultaneously with government action to encourage the overall expansion of student numbers in Australian higher education to move further from an elitist to a mass higher education system.

At the same time, the government made clear a set of "national priority" areas for higher education. The areas so defined were those claimed to be directly related to economic prosperity and growth : business, computing, engineering, science and technology, and so on. Notably absent from the list was the area of humanities and the social sciences, by this time the "home" of the majority of communication courses. Thus, recent opportunities provided by systemic

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

restructuring have been dampened in universities where student numbers in humanities faculties were held constant or declined absolutely or relative to total enrolments.

The system restructuring, however, also had as one of its principal aims the improvement of access to higher education. One result of activities aimed to achieve this objective has been the allocation of a greater than average share of growth to several new universities located in areas which previously suffered from underprovision of higher education opportunity, such that participation rates in higher education were markedly below the national average. Some of this growth has been allocated within those universities to the humanities and social sciences and, in a number of universities much of this has come to communication studies where undergraduate demand far outstrips the number of places available. Opportunities in the postgraduate area are also being eagerly taken up.

Growth in postgraduate activity has been one of the significant developments of the post-1987 period in Australian communication scholarship. The earlier period of growth in undergraduate studies established a pool of potential graduate students. An increasing number of staff with PhDs and graduate supervision experience accumulated. The new universities have been eager to expand their graduate course offerings and research programs as they sought to build graduate student and research profiles. The environment was right and the field of communication studies was ready for the development. The result has been a mushrooming of graduate coursework programs leading to the MA, and graduate research programs leading to the MA(Hons) and PhD.

Research activity in the area of communication studies is expanding rapidly. While, for funding purposes, communication studies lies within the humanities and social sciences which continues to have to fight hard for research support against the identified priority areas, an achievement of recent years has been the establishment of several clear communication funding categories by the Australian Research Council. A further encouragement to research has been provided by the new universities which are providing an encouraging research environment and a research culture

markedly different from that in the former institutes and colleges where communication studies was concentrated, and where the principal emphasis was upon undergraduate teaching.

The post-1987 period has seen renewed interest in cultural studies in Australia, with a close association being formed between communication and cultural studies. Cultural studies could, of course, have emerged in any of a number of places in the humanities, social sciences, or liberal arts fields. As in the United States, in Australia the impact of cultural studies has been greatest via established departments of communication and English. In the past three or four years, the impact of cultural studies has been very apparent in new curricula, conference programs, journal content, staff appointments and funded research projects. The reception afforded to cultural studies has ranged from it being embraced as a welcome bed-fellow of communication studies to suspicion and a feeling among some that, not having made it in Australian universities on its own, it is finding a place by appropriating some of the "space" occupied by communication studies over the past two decades. While many in Australia use the term communication *and* cultural studies, the present relationship between these fields of interest might most appropriately be described as communication/cultural studies. In this regard, it is interesting to note that those concerned with cultural studies in Australia have recently formed the Australian Cultural Studies Association and plan to revive the Australian Journal of Cultural Studies.

In this brief account of the post-1987 period, I would like to make one final observation. I have been interested to note in the last year or two that several of the larger and established universities, including some which had previously resisted the establishment of the new field, are introducing communication studies. Even more interesting is to note how it has been done : where growth numbers did not allow it to be part of expansion, the simple expedient of redefining existing subjects, clusters of subjects and majors *as* communication has been adopted. All this is a response to high levels of student demand and the exciting changes taking place across the humanities and social sciences generally, and suggests communication will remain "flavour of the month" for many months and years to come.

The future?

What are the likely paths of development for communication studies in Australia for the remainder of this decade and into the 21st Century? While the future is always uncertain and prediction somewhat hazardous, it seems reasonable to make a number of predictions based upon present trends with respect to disciplinary development, Australia's growing links with its Asian and Pacific neighbours, and possible further structural changes to Australian tertiary (post high school) education.

The field of communication studies is likely to continue to grow, partly as a response to student demand and partly because of its relevance and potential contribution to the development of the humanities and social sciences generally. Vocationally oriented work in communication studies will remain strong at undergraduate and coursework masters levels. There will be continued emphasis upon specialisation from the areas of media analysis, media production, journalism, professional writing, public relations and advertising, and increased interest in the area of health communication. All are likely to be further informed by developments in cultural studies. Cultural studies inputs to various strands of undergraduate programs will expand and lead to development of further communication and cultural studies majors. As cultural studies attracts students in its own right, as it is now doing in numerous Australian universities, it may come to dominate in what will then be new cultural studies and communication majors.

The recent rapid rise in research activity is certain to continue throughout the 1990s. The activity will be more focused than previously, with research activity being carried forward by focused research centres established within and between universities and being the subject of increased external funding. Associated with this development will be the further expansion of undergraduate honours year research programs and of postgraduate research programs leading to award of the MA(Hons) and PhD. This activity is likely to lead to the greater incidence of conference presentation by faculty researchers and graduate research students and an increased flow of quality submissions to Australian and overseas journals. Collaborative research by

Australian researchers and their overseas counterparts is also likely to raise the publication profile of Australian communication studies.

As Australia increasingly recognises its place in Asia and among the Pacific-rim nations, Australian communication studies will be drawn to an increasingly Asian focus. The next 10-15 years is likely to see much more interest within Australia about how communication studies has developed in Asia, much more use of Asian materials and case studies in teaching, a new Asian focus for research by Australians, a constant interchange of Australian and Asian communication students and university faculty, and a significant development of the off-shore teaching of communication in Asia by Australian universities. Intercultural communication, which to date has received surprisingly little attention in Australia, is likely to become a new focus of research and teaching, possibly in association with work from cultural studies and as "intercommunal studies".

While the main impetus for this interest in communication across cultures is Australia's increased contact with Asia, the impact may be much broader than this. It is likely that the work already commenced with respect to personal and media communication among Australia's Aboriginal people will be expanded and that communication studies will make a useful contribution to new programs in Aboriginal studies. It is also likely that greater interest will be taken by Australian communication scholars in Australia's Pacific neighbours as the teaching of communication studies expands in New Zealand and as interest in island nations such as Fiji and the Cook Islands increases following their introduction of broadcast television and satellite communications.

Throughout this paper it has been emphasised that the development of communication studies in Australia has been closely linked with structural change in post-secondary education. In that context, it is worth noting in concluding these comments on possible futures, that government attention is now turning quickly to a significant change in the balance between the university and technical education sectors of tertiary (post-secondary) education. What is being contemplated is a major shift of government emphasis and expenditure towards the technical education sector (and presumably away from growth in the university sector). If this occurs to the extent now being

predicted as governments seize on actions that they see as helpful in shaking off the economic recession, university growth may be severely curtailed. Given the emphasis upon identified "priority areas" for university activity and growth, the humanities and social sciences may be squeezed as never before. As faculties of humanities and social sciences are "home" to communication studies, any imposition of restrictions upon development in the humanities and social sciences could confront those involved in communication studies with their first major crisis since the field had its beginnings in Australia around two decades ago, and with their biggest challenge.

REFERENCES

Crocker, W. (1970). Speech education in Australia, in Casmir, F. and Harms, L. (Eds.). International Studies of National Speech Education Systems. Minneapolis : Burgess Publishing Co.

Dissanayake, W. (1986). The need for the study of Asian approaches to communication, Media Asia 13, 1, 6-13.

Galvin, M. (1990). Notes towards a social critique of Australian communication studies, Australian Journal of Communication 17, 3, 163-173.

Irwin, H. (1984). Communication studies in Australia : Achievements and prospects. Paper presented at the Convention of the International Communication Association, Division of International and Intercultural Communication, San Francisco, May.

Irwin, H. (1989). Communication teaching and research : Life after the White Paper, Australian Journal of Communication 15, 42-51.

Kress, G. (1983). Directions in communication studies, Australian Journal of Communication 14, 1-6.

Lewis, G. (1982). The Anglo-American influence on Australian communication studies, Australian Journal of Communication 1 and 2, 14-20.

Molloy, B. (1990). Communication studies in Australia : Reflection and text, Australian Journal of Communication 17, 3, 64-94.

Petelin, R. (1990). Programs in communication in Australian tertiary institutions, Australian Journal of Communication 17, 3, 95-162.

Putnis, P. (1986). Communication studies in Australia : Paradigms and contexts, Media, Culture and Society 8, 143-57.